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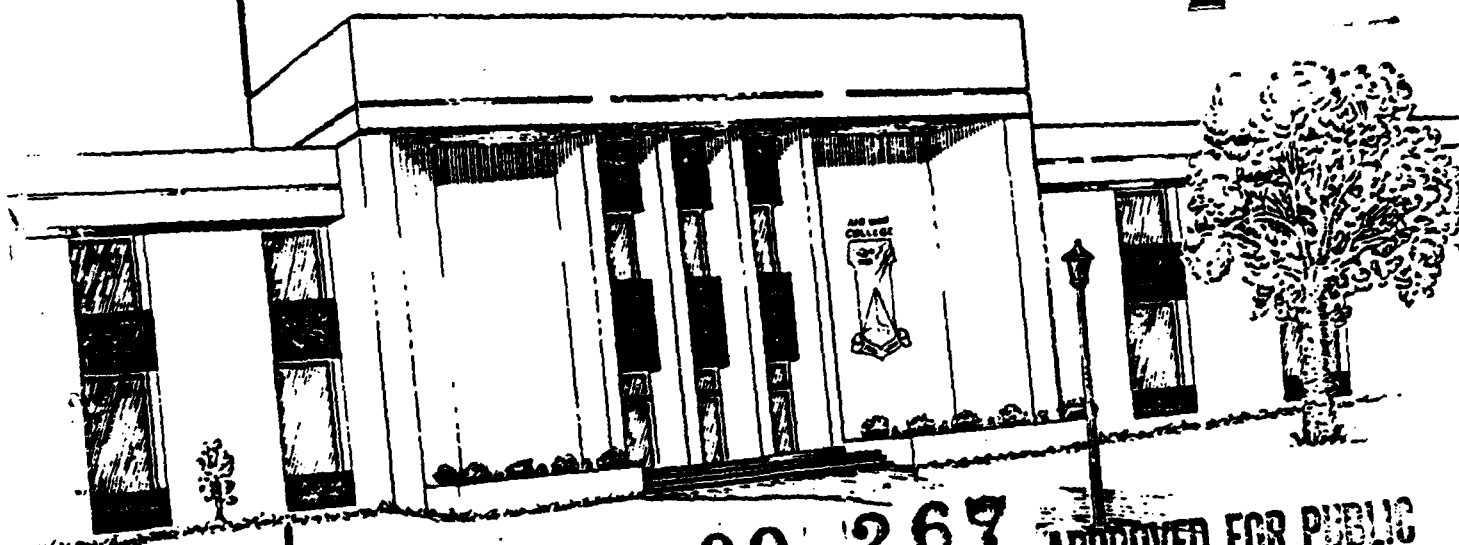
## RESEARCH REPORT

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U. S. AND SOVIET APPROACHES TO NUCLEAR WAR  
TERMINATION: STRENGTHENING THE WEST'S HAND

By PAUL M. CURREN

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U.S. AND SOVIET APPROACHES TO NUCLEAR WAR TERMINATION:  
STRENGTHENING THE WEST'S HAND

by  
Paul M. Curren

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. David Farnsworth

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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# AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: U.S. and Soviet Approaches to Nuclear War  
War Termination: Different Policies, Similar  
Problems

AUTHOR: Paul M. Currer

U.S. and Soviet nuclear war termination doctrines are fundamentally different, and misunderstandings about them could result in rapid escalation once nuclear weapons had been used. The period just before the nuclear threshold is reached would be a key time to persuade the Soviets that further conflict would be adverse to their interests. By taking into account evolving Soviet doctrine, the U.S. could strengthen its hand in resolving a burgeoning crisis. *Reprinted*

*environmental policy (47) ←*

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul Curren's interest in conflict resolution began with his assignment as an Air Force intelligence officer with the Deputy Chief of Staff/Intelligence, Headquarters, Strategic Air Command, in 1976. He subsequently served with the Assistant Chief of Staff/Intelligence, Headquarters, USAF, and with the Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency. He earned a Juris Doctor Degree from the University of Southern California in 1972 and a Master of Laws Degree in international law from Georgetown University in 1980. Mr. Curren is a graduate of the Air War College, Class of 1988.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	DISCLAIMER. . . . .	ii
	ABSTRACT. . . . .	iii
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH . . . . .	iv
I	INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
II	U.S. AND SOVIET APPROACHES TO WAR TERMINATION .	4
	U.S. Doctrine . . . . .	4
	Soviet Doctrine . . . . .	7
	The Sokolovskiy Era . . . . .	8
	The Ustinov Era . . . . .	10
	The Ustinov/Ogarkov Controversy . . . . .	11
	The Gorbachev/Yazov Era . . . . .	13
III	THE PROBLEM OF MISPERCEPTION. . . . .	18
	Crossing the Nuclear Threshold. . . . .	21
IV	WORKING TOWARD WAR TERMINATION. . . . .	22
	Prior to the Start of Crisis. . . . .	23
	After the Start of Conventional Conflict. . . . .	24
	After the Nuclear Threshold is Crossed. . . . .	26
V	CONCLUSION. . . . .	27
	BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	29

**U.S. AND SOVIET APPROACHES TO NUCLEAR WAR TERMINATION:  
STRENGTHENING THE WEST'S HAND**

**INTRODUCTION**

The well-publicized Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Missiles, signed by President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev in December 1987, signifies a fundamental change in Soviet attitudes about the appropriate scope of arms control agreements. Many commentators have noted that the treaty shows a new willingness to reduce the number of nuclear warheads and gives unprecedented consent to intrusive on-site inspection procedures.<sup>1</sup> It also reflects an evolution in the Soviets' thinking about what amount of nuclear force is sufficient to ensure their security<sup>2</sup>, and it may show an even broader reconsideration of how they see a major war starting, being fought, and ending.<sup>3</sup>

For decades, U.S. defense strategy policy has focused on improving the country's ability to wage a successful nuclear war, should deterrence fail. An important component of that strategy has been the assumption that the U.S. leadership

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1. See, e.g., "Reagan-Gorbachev Summit Will Begin Here on Dec. 7," Washington Post, 31 October 1987, pp. A1, A17.

2. See Tom Wicker, "Soviet Military Debate: A New Phase of Nuclear Strategy?," New York Times, 17 September 1987, p. A35.

3. See pp. 13-17 below.

fully understands Soviet views of war, war fighting, and war termination. Any substantial Soviet changes in this regard should affect U.S. strategy.<sup>4</sup>

This paper seeks to answer the question, "Are the U.S. and Soviet national security policies toward nuclear conflict and its resolution essentially incompatible?" Its thesis is that the United States and Soviet Union see nuclear war being fought, and ending, in fundamentally different ways. Misunderstandings about each side's doctrine could result in rapid, uncontrolled escalation once nuclear weapons had been used. Clear Executive Branch delineation of U.S. doctrine on the fighting and termination of nuclear war is required, ~~thus~~ to avoid catastrophic results if a U.S.-Soviet conflict started.

Thorough analysis of this subject requires consideration of three subquestions:

- Do the U.S. and Soviet Union have adequate doctrines regarding nuclear conflict and its resolution?
- Is the Soviet doctrine changing?
- What approaches to war termination would be most useful for the U.S. leadership--civilian as well as military--to take after the start of nuclear

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4. One commentator has recently accused top U.S. leadership of "policy-relevant ignorance" regarding the current state of Soviet war termination doctrine. See Stephen J. Cimbala and Keith A. Dunn, eds., Conflict Termination Military Strategy: Coercion, Persuasion, and War, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), p. 4.

war?

The paper also considers mutual misperceptions about doctrine, discusses the importance of identifying the nuclear threshold in the early stages of a conventional conflict, and suggests some practical steps that the United States could take after the start of a conventional conflict to strengthen the West's hand in resolving a growing crisis.

## CHAPTER II

### U.S. AND SOVIET APPROACHES TO WAR TERMINATION

U.S. Doctrine. Although U.S. doctrine on the conduct and termination of nuclear war has been the subject of considerable discussion in the academic world, it has received far less comment from government officials. Much of the U.S. approach to the execution and termination of war is contained in documents not available to the public.<sup>5</sup> Enough material apparently has been officially released, however, to provide <sup>the</sup> ~~a~~ gist of ~~the~~ overall U.S. doctrine. Essentially, it is to deter war if at all possible, but if deterrence fails to be able to fight at different levels of conflict so that escalation can be controlled and the conflict ended at the lowest possible level commensurate with achieving U.S. interests. This view of war contemplates that conflict ends with strategic surrender of the adversary.

Perhaps the most authoritative public document

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5. For a discussion of what is purported to be in Presidential Review Memoranda and National Security Decision Directives, see Alan J. Vick, "Post-Attack Strategic Command and Control Survival: Options for the Future," Orbis 29 (Spring 1985), pp. 95-117; Jeffrey Richelson, "PD-59, NSDD-13, and the Reagan Strategic Modernization Program," Journal of Strategic Studies 6 (June 1983), pp. 125-146; Barry R. Posen and Stephen Van Evera, "Departure from Containment: Defense Policy and the Reagan Administration," International Security 8 (Summer 1983), pp. 3-45; "Why C<sup>3</sup>I is the Pentagon's Top Priority," Government Executive, January 1982, pp. 14ff; and Michael Getler, "Administration's Nuclear War Policy Stance Still Murky," Washington Post, 10 November 1982, p. A24.

expressing relevant U.S. doctrine is a 1987 White House publication entitled National Security Strategy of the United States. It says:

"...we must ensure that...[the Soviets] clearly perceive that the United States has the capability to respond appropriately to any Soviet attempt to wage a nuclear war, and that we have the means to do this in ways which will defeat Soviet military objectives without necessarily triggering a massive exchange."<sup>6</sup>

The pamphlet adds, "...the United States also requires sufficient residual capability to provide leverage for early war termination, and to avoid coercion in a post-conflict world..."<sup>7</sup>

Related Department of Defense documents, such as the Secretary of Defense's Annual Report and Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, present a similar theme. Secretary Weinberger's annual report for 1987 says that should deterrence fail, the United States would "seek to terminate any war at the earliest practical time and restore peace on terms favorable to the United States that secure all of our aims and those of our allies and friends..."<sup>8</sup> This objective would be accomplished by a response sufficient to convince the Soviets

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6. U.S. President, National Security Strategy of the United States, (Washington: The White House, 1987), p. 22.

7. Ibid.

8. U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1988, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1987), p. 46.

that they could not prevail in a nuclear war.<sup>9</sup> AFM 1-1 says that if deterrence fails, the United States national security objective is to fight at the level of intensity and duration necessary to obtain U.S. political objectives.<sup>10</sup>

Although these documents present a consistent strategy for dealing with nuclear conflict, they are deficient in several respects. First, while they focus on deterrence as the cornerstone of U.S. policy, they actually say little about what the United States would do if deterrence fails. Second, they draw virtually no distinction between fighting a conventional and a nuclear war. This is in contrast to Soviet statements.<sup>11</sup> Third, they do not reflect an integrated diplomatic and military response to conflict resolution<sup>12</sup>; nor do they state how the United States

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9. Ibid.

10. U.S. Department of the Air Force, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force (Air Force Manual 1-1), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 16 March 1984), pp. 1-2.

11. See pp. 10 and 13 below.

12. The need for joint use of diplomacy and military force was stated more emphatically during the 1970s. One Carter Administration official, for example, said, "...the controlled use of nuclear weapons would...stop the immediate aggression and create a pause or hiatus in the enemy's military activities to allow time for diplomacy to work..." Reagan Administration statements, in contrast, imply that greater emphasis is placed on military force. See Lynn E. Davis, Limited Nuclear Options: Deterrence and the New American Doctrine (Adelphi Paper No. 121), (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975/76), p. 6; and U.S. President, *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

actually sees a war ending.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, these statements may not recognize that Soviet thinking on war fighting has changed during the past few years.<sup>13</sup>

Soviet Doctrine. It is now becoming apparent that after nearly three years in office, General Secretary Gorbachev is avidly pursuing a number of major reforms designed to enhance the economic productivity of the country<sup>14</sup>. Less obvious, however, is that the new regime is reexamining its national defense strategy and the type of personnel found in its defense establishment.<sup>15</sup>

Changes in Soviet defense doctrine reflect a maturing of Soviet thought on the fighting and termination of war that has been neither as one-dimensional, nor as stagnant, as the West has sometimes perceived. Most apparent has been a clear

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13. Secretary of Defense Carlucci's annual report for 1988 distinguishes between fighting conventional and nuclear war. It also acknowledges that General Secretary Gorbachev has started a new Soviet "peace offensive". The effect of these changes on U.S. policy remains to be seen, however. See U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1989, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1988), pp. 23-24 and 57-58.

14. See Mikhail Gorbachev, Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 33. General Secretary Gorbachev calls his campaign "[p]erhaps...the most important and most radical program for economic reform our country has had since Lenin introduced his New Economic Policy in 1921." Ibid.

15. Ibid., pp. 139-144.

differentiation between conventional and nuclear war, the introduction of a new concept called "defense sufficiency," and an often-repeated desire to keep conflict conventional if at all possible.<sup>16</sup>

In general, Soviet doctrine regarding the fighting and termination of war has gone through three phases since the mid-1960s. The first is reflected in the writings of Marshal V.D. Sokolovskiy and the second in the statements of Marshal Dmitri Ustinov and Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov. The third, which is still evolving, is shown in the writings and speeches of Mikhail Gorbachev and his Minister of Defense, D.T. Yazov.

The Sokolovskiy Era. For the West, perhaps the most widely-recognized proponent of Soviet military strategy is Marshal V.D. Sokolovskiy, whose book Soviet Military Strategy has been widely available for more than two decades. The last edition, published in Moscow in 1963, sets forth what is often identified as a "war fighting" strategy.<sup>17</sup> According to Sokolovskiy, no essential difference exists in the way nuclear or conventional war is fought. Nuclear war should be conducted using the same principles as conventional war, but on a far greater scale. More important, nuclear war is

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16. See pp. 13-17 below.

17. See U.S. Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), p. 65.

survivable and should be fought with that quality in mind.<sup>18</sup>

How does Sokolovskiy see nuclear war ending? According to him, nuclear war ends only with the complete destruction of the enemy--strategic victory<sup>19</sup>. He typically notes that "in a future world war...it may be assumed that the belligerents will use the most decisive means of waging war with, above all, the mass use of nuclear rocket weapons for the purpose of achieving the annihilation or capitulation of the enemy in the shortest possible time."<sup>20</sup>

Several points further characterize Sokolovskiy's thinking. First, although he acknowledges that nuclear war is more destructive than conventional, he still regards it as survivable. Second, he stresses that nuclear war should be fought quickly and massively. Third, he shows no thought of

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18. Marshal V.D. Sokolovskiy, Soviet Military Strategy (third edition), ed. Harriet Fast Scott (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975), pp. 206, 208-209.

19. For a discussion of the Soviet concept of strategic victory, see Fritz W. Ermarth, "Contrasts in American and Soviet Strategic Thought," in The Art and Practice of Military Strategy, ed. George Edward Thibault (Washington: National Defense University, 1984), p. 604.

20. Ibid., pp. 202--203. Sokolovskiy makes this point repeatedly throughout his book. In a later section, for example, he says, "A simultaneous nuclear rocket strike against the vital centers and means of armed combat of an enemy is the greatest and most reliable way of achieving victory in modern war...This principle has now become indisputable." Ibid., p. 276.

a gradual or escalated response to a nuclear attack<sup>21</sup>.

Much of current U.S. national defense strategy appears to have been made in response to Sokolovskiy's work. The absence of any statements in his writings about escalation control or limited nuclear options, however, suggests that there are significant differences between the U.S. and Soviet views of how a war would be fought and won.

The Ustinov Era. The publications of Marshal D.F. Ustinov, General Secretary Brezhnev's Minister of Defense, show that a significant evolution in Soviet defensive doctrine took place in the 1970s. For the first time, the Soviets began to distinguish nuclear from conventional warfare. Because nuclear war would be catastrophic, conflict should be limited to the conventional level. At the same time, Brezhnev himself avowed in a famous speech at Tula, USSR, that the Soviet Union did not seek strategic superiority, only parity.<sup>22</sup>

In an article entitled "Parrying the Menace of Nuclear War," Marshal Ustinov called upon the Soviet armed forces in 1982 to devote "still more attention" to the problem of preventing the escalation of a military conflict to the

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21. Ibid., pp. 210-211.

22. "Rech' tavarisha L.I. Brezhneva," [Comrade Brezhnev's Speech], Pravda, 17 March 1977, p. 2.

nuclear level. He points out that the problem is particularly troublesome because the "U.S. and NATO would be expected to augment their forces with nuclear weapons during periods of hostility."<sup>23</sup>

Although Ustinov implies that war should be ended if at all possible during the conventional phase, he does not contradict Sokolovskiy about the need for obtaining strategic victory once the nuclear stage has been reached. While he seems to recognize that escalation control might be possible during the conventional phase of conflict, he rejects the idea that this would continue once a war became nuclear.

The Ustinov/Ogarkov Controversy. A dispute regarding which doctrine to follow--Sokolovskiy's or Ustinov's--appears to have become public in 1983 between Ustinov and Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, then Chief of the Soviet General Staff. Early in 1983, Ogarkov publicly espoused a purely Sokolovskian view: nuclear war is in reality no different from conventional; it is survivable; and the only legitimate objective during nuclear conflict is to completely destroy the enemy.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Marshal D.F. Ustinov, "Otvesti ygrozu yadernoi voenni" [Parrying the Threat of Nuclear War], Pravda, 12 July 1982, p. 4.

24. N.V. Ogarkov, Marshal, "Voenaya nauka i oboroni sostialisticheskaya rodina." [Military Science and Defense of the Socialist Motherland], Kommunist 7 (May 1978), p. 117; George C. Weickhardt, "Ustinov vs. Ogarkov," Problems of

Ogarkov apparently was forced to recant this view, first in an unusual 1983 interview with a New York Times reporter<sup>25</sup>, and then more fully in his 1985 book entitled History Teaches Vigilance.<sup>26</sup> In his book, Ogarkov writes that "throughout the 1950s and 1960s, nuclear weapons were few and viewed only as a means of supplementing the firepower of troops..."<sup>27</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the rapid quantitative growth of nuclear weapons--and the development of long-range, precision delivery means--had led to a "fundamental reassessment of the role of these weapons, and to a break in previous views on their place and importance in war, in the methods of conducting engagements and operations, and even on the possibility of waging war at all with the use of nuclear weapons."<sup>28</sup>

The "fundamental reassessment" that Ogarkov refers to apparently was not finished in 1985. The most recent phase of the evolution of Soviet doctrine was publicly revealed by General Secretary Gorbachev and his defense minister, D.T. Yazov, in their 1987 presentation of the concept of "defense

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Communism 34, January-February 1985, p. 78.

25. Leslie H. Gelb, "Soviet Marshal Warns the U.S. On Its Missiles," New York Times, 17 March 1983, p. A1.

26. Marshal N.V. Ogarkov, Istoriya uchit bditel'nosti [History Teaches Vigilance], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985), p. 51.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

sufficiency".

The Gorbachev/Yazov Era. Along with his Perestroika and Glasnost campaigns, General Secretary Gorbachev has repeatedly spoken of a "revolutionary" revision of defense policy during his tenure. According to Gorbachev, this evolution was responsible for the INF Treaty and for movement toward the potentially deep reductions that would result from an agreement on strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>29</sup>

There appear to be two principal parts to the Gorbachev doctrine. First are repeated assertions that nuclear war must be avoided at all costs and that conflict must be kept conventional if at all possible.<sup>30</sup> Second is the concept of "defense sufficiency": force levels must be strong enough to deter aggression from potential adversaries, but not any greater.<sup>31</sup> Notably absent, however, is any explicit commentary by Gorbachev or Yazov about how a conflict would end once it reaches the nuclear stage. This lapse suggests a reaffirmation of one aspect of Sokolovskiy's doctrine that

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29. Gorbachev, *ibid.*, pp. 139-144.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 143 (footnote 1). One scholar of Soviet studies has commented, "One change [in the Gorbachev era] is the emphasis of recent Soviet literature that pre-nuclear concepts of military art cannot be dismissed in the wholesale fashion dictated by Sokolovskiy's volume." See William E. Odom, "Soviet Force Posture: Dilemmas and Directions," Problems of Communism 34 (July-August 1985), p. 9.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

survived through the Ustinov era: once a conflict has passed the nuclear threshold, the only appropriate goal is strategic victory.

The concept of "defense sufficiency" appears to be the greatest single change from earlier Soviet defense doctrine. The policy seems to be based on the idea that if relative levels of forces discourage aggression, then lower levels are acceptable as long as they still deter.

The clearest official statement of the new doctrine to date occurred on 27 July 1987, when Defense Minister Yazov explained a number of decisions adopted at the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee (PCC) meeting in May 1987. Yazov describes the principle of "defense sufficiency" as having "precisely the magnitude of armed forces necessary to defend oneself against an attack from outside."<sup>32</sup> He notes that the composition, quantity, and quality of Warsaw Pact armed forces is measured against the threat. The primary objective is to guarantee that the forces are strong enough to ensure the security of the Warsaw Pact and to "rebuff aggression."<sup>33</sup> Should the Warsaw Pact be attacked, however,

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32. Minister of Defense and Army General D.T. Yazov, "Voennaya doktrina Varshavskovo Dogovora--doktrina zashisiti mira i sostializma" [The Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact is the Doctrine of the Defense of Peace and Socialism], Pravda, 27 July 1987, p. 5.

33. Ibid.

military force must be sufficient to give "a crushing rebuff to the aggressor."<sup>34</sup>

Yazov flatly rejects what he interprets as the doctrine of "flexible response", calling it "a trick designed to delude simpletons."<sup>35</sup> He rejects the concept of "nuclear deterrence" as well, saying that it is "contradictory and dangerous" because the "NATO concept...renders the military equilibrium shaky and increases the risk of the outbreak of nuclear war."<sup>36</sup>

Writers from the Soviet academic world also have explained the new defensive doctrine in detail. In an article published in Izvestiya on 13 August 1987, Soviet Doctor of Historical Science L. Semeiko said that the concept has two fundamental parts. The "political" aspect involves communicating a sense of reasonableness about the actions of the Soviet Union. It is designed "to ensure that the other side has no unwarranted fears."<sup>37</sup> The "military" aspect requires that "military power and combat readiness be sufficient to prevent oneself from being taken by

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34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

37. L. Semeiko, "Vmesto gor oryzhiya...O printsipe pazymnoi doctatochnosti," [Raising Arms Together: On the Principle of Reasonable Sufficiency], Izvestiya, 13 August 1987, p. 5.

surprise...and, if a hostile attack is nonetheless launched, to deliver a crushing rebuff to the aggressor..."<sup>38</sup>

In an article published on 5 July 1987 in Pravda, Academician Ye. Primakov strongly underscored the political element of the new defensive doctrine. He explains that:

"...until relatively recently, we still said--and not only said but were certain of it--that if...[western forces] committed aggression against the [Soviet Union], they would be consumed on the flower of the war they had kindled... In the past, this conclusion pointed to the need for increasing fighting efficiency as virtually the only means of maintaining the country's security at the proper level...

"Today, such assessments and interpretations are clearly insufficient and inaccurate...While maintaining the great importance of improving its defense capability, the Soviet Union is bringing to the fore political means of ensuring its security..."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, while the military aspect of the new doctrine is designed to maintain sufficient force to discourage attack, the political aspect is designed to apply all other means to achieve the same result. While Primakov is not specific about what these means are, one can identify at least some of steps that the Soviet leadership has taken in this regard. Most obvious is the dramatic use that Gorbachev has made of the print and electronic media, and even of his own books, to

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38. Ibid.

39. Ye. Primakov, "Novii filosofskii vneshnyaya politika," [A New Philosophy of Foreign Policy], Pravda, 10 July 1987, p. 4.

proclaim his diplomatic proposals.<sup>40</sup> A number of western commentators have criticized the INF Treaty for shifting the balance of power in Europe from nuclear to conventional forces<sup>41</sup>; if this shift has actually occurred, it would be consistent with the Gorbachev and Yazov statements about the need to keep conflict conventional while ensuring that the Warsaw Pact is sufficiently strong to discourage aggression.

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40. See, e.g., Mikhail S. Gorbachev, Gorbachev: Mandate for Peace, (New York: Paperjacks, Ltd., 1987); and Gorbachev, Perestroika, *ibid.*

41. See, e.g., Edwin M. Yoder, "Hellbent On An Arms Control Treaty," Washington Post, 30 August 1987, p. C7.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PROBLEM OF MISPERCEPTION

Gorbachev's statements about nuclear conflict present a potential dilemma for the U.S. defense policy community. Taken at face value, they indicate that although the Soviet Union is not willing to fight a nuclear conflict, it would engage in a massive response if a nuclear war starts. Should the policy community assume that a war of this type can be controlled? This would be a risky gamble because nothing in current Soviet literature indicates an acceptance of escalation control after the nuclear threshold has been crossed.

Differences in the way that the United States and Soviet Union see a war being fought, and ending, make it difficult for the policy community to assess what steps should be taken in a conflict that leads up, and extends into, nuclear war. For the United States, conventional or nuclear war ends with "strategic surrender," which occurs at the lowest level of conflict needed to convince the other side that continued hostilities would not be in its interests. For the Soviet Union, nuclear war ends with "victory"--the complete destruction of the enemy's ability and will to fight. The two approaches have a similar problem; each side could easily misconstrue what the other was doing because their views of fighting and ending war are so different.

Much has been written about the care with which the United States could proceed up the escalatory ladder by using various attack options.<sup>42</sup> Soviet leaders, however, have been reluctant to acknowledge any possibility of observing limits in nuclear war if their homeland is attacked. Long after acquiring the technical means for measured nuclear response, Soviet political and military leaders continue to reject the idea of limitation in strategic nuclear war.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, what may appear obvious as a limited nuclear option to the United States may be perceived by the Soviets as the first strike or initial phase of a major attack option. Soviet statements about the need for quick and decisive action once a conflict has reached the nuclear stage reflect that they might perceive a small attack as massive when the U.S. actually intended it to be a warning or a demonstration of resolve.<sup>44</sup>

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42. See, e.g., Davis, *ibid.*; Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and Lawrence Freedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 225-256. At least one analyst draws a darker picture of U.S. technical ability to control nuclear forces once the nuclear threshold has been passed. See Christopher J. Branch, Fighting a Long Nuclear War: A Strategy, Force, Policy Mismatch, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1984).

43. Graham T. Allison, Albert Carnesdale, and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Hawks, Doves, and Owls: An Agenda for Avoiding Nuclear War (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 172-173.

44. Such a reaction would be deeply rooted in Soviet strategic culture. The preferences and habits of the

It is not difficult to imagine other scenarios where misperceptions of the other sides' actions would result in unintended escalation. Such a misinterpretation could occur if the Soviets started to move most of their attack submarines out of their normal Northern Fleet basing areas to support conventional hostilities in the Atlantic. By taking this step, the Soviets probably would send the message that the nuclear phase of conflict was rapidly approaching.

In a worst case scenario, misperceptions could lead to preemption in the situation where one side's forces were on high alert, and the other side thought that such a step was preparatory to an actual strike. The case for "waiting to see what happens"--for conceding the operational initiative to the other side--could appear quite weak.<sup>45</sup> In such a situation, the chasm that so often separates military plans from political needs could once again become an important cause of war.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, Soviet strategic policy contains a strong element of professionalism and military rationalism

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military bureaucracy, furthermore, would tend to rule out any possibility of improvisation in favor of American-formulated rules of restraint. See Desmond Ball, Can Nuclear War Be Controlled? (Adelphi Paper No. 169), (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), p. 35.

45. Ermarth, *ibid.*, p. 609.

46. See Richard Ned Lebow, Nuclear Crisis Management: A Dangerous Illusion, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 104.

with which the United States probably could do business in the interest of common safety.<sup>47</sup> Although there likely would be little flexibility in Soviet thinking after a decision to conduct a nuclear strike, there may be far more room for settlement of a conflict during the conventional phase than U.S. planners have previously realized. In fact, Soviet differentiation of conventional from nuclear conflict is one aspect of their thinking that could be exploited to terminate a conflict on acceptable terms to the United States.

Crossing The Nuclear Threshold. Several factors show that the period just before the nuclear threshold would be a key point at which to seek conflict resolution. First, any debate within the Kremlin about the use of nuclear weapons would be at its most intense point. Second, the leadership and policy-making structure of the Soviet Union would still be intact. And third, Soviet flexibility toward reaching a diplomatic solution probably would decrease rapidly after the first nuclear weapons were used.

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47. Ibid., p. 610.

## CHAPTER IV

### WORKING TOWARD WAR TERMINATION

One of the most important steps that the United States could take in a crisis with the Soviets would be to exploit any debate that occurred within their own leadership structure. As the nuclear threshold approached, the emergence of a debate in the Kremlin about how to proceed could be used to "buy time" for the North Atlantic Alliance, enabling it to operate in the way envisioned by its members.

Where would such a debate take place, and what would it look like? Although it would not be public, discussion of when and how to end hostilities probably would involve an ascertainable number of readily-identifiable authorities within the Defense Council, the most critical party body for military decision making.<sup>48</sup> Some members of the Defense Council (such as the Minister of Defense) might be willing to undertake a nuclear strike to end a conflict quickly and decisively, but others (i.e., the General Secretary or Foreign Minister)--whose jobs are to ensure the continuity of the state--might not be so readily inclined.<sup>49</sup>

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48. See Graham Vernon, ed., Soviet Perceptions of War and Peace (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1984), p. 9.

49. One scholar has pointed out that "Policy arguments are indeed possible [in senior Soviet circles]." See Ermarth, *ibid.*, p. 600. The possibility of debate also was been reflected in popular literature on strategic conflict. See,

Each side's willingness to negotiate probably would decrease after the nuclear threshold had been crossed because of the emotional impact of nuclear strikes on one's home territory.<sup>50</sup> U.S. exploitation of a Kremlin debate would be most likely to work, thus, if responsible agencies acted in an integrated manner prior to and during the conventional phase of conflict.

The following discussion illustrates some useful steps that the United States could take to increase its chances of successfully resolving a nuclear crisis.

Prior to the Start of a Crisis. An important objective that should be pursued well before any crisis is to reduce uncertainties about the other side's current and likely future forces, practices, and intentions. The ongoing arms control negotiations between the United States and Soviet Union are an important vehicle in this regard. The negotiations facilitate communication between informed

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e.g., General Sir John Hackett, The Third World War, August 1985, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1979), p. 278; General Sir John Hackett, The Third World War: The Untold Story, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), p. 209; and Tom Clancy, Red Storm Rising, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 622-623, 630-631, and 637-639.

50. Many events could occur after the nuclear threshold which would easily cut off rational evaluation of the situation. It is not clear from publicly available literature, for example, whether the Soviet Union could successfully rescind an execution order that had been transmitted to its submarine forces. But an inadvertent nuclear strike after a cease-fire probably would eliminate any possibility of a negotiated end to the crisis.

representatives of governments and provide a place where the two sides can express concerns, exchange data, resolve ambiguities, address compliance, develop confidence-building measures, and achieve agreed-upon limitations. At a minimum, the talks reduce uncertainties and constrain "worst case" planning on both sides.

Because there has been no face-to-face discussion of war termination doctrine with the Soviets to date, the U.S. has had to deal with unnecessary uncertainty about what should be a clearly understood aspect of Soviet strategy. Discussions of this subject at the Ministerial level and above, thus, should have a high priority. The newly-created nuclear risk reduction centers, which are a component of the verification program for the recently-signed INF Treaty, would be a good place to start such discussions.<sup>51</sup>

After the Start of Conventional Conflict. Although a key goal for the West would be to gain control of the situation through the use of conventional weapons, this result could occur only if proper preparations are made during peacetime--such as by improving NATO's conventional capability or by obtaining asymmetrical reductions in conventional arms negotiations. It would be important not to plan for the early release of nuclear weapons because the

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51. U.S. President, Joint U.S. Soviet Summit Statement (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 10 December 1987), p. 5.

first laydown probably would significantly decrease U.S. options.

Public diplomacy, private negotiations, informal discussions with Soviet officials, and military force would all have to be used in a coordinated manner to achieve common objectives.<sup>52</sup> Useful actions in this regard would include:

- Identification of Soviet grievances, what their motivations are for war, and how they see war ending.
- Assessment of what the Soviets see as the threshold for nuclear conflict.
- The use of public and private diplomacy to argue the futility of crossing the nuclear threshold.

Repeated Soviet assertions about the destructiveness of nuclear war could be used to influence the likely Politburo debate about nuclear release. Pressure from third-party countries--especially those in the Socialist camp--also could have a similar effect. Channels of communication would have to be kept open throughout the entire crisis to ensure that

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52. The U.S. decision-making process probably also would change as the nuclear threshold approached, with the outcome not necessarily subject to the "checks" of peacetime government administration. During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, for example, President Kennedy created a relatively small "Executive Committee" (ExCom) that handled the situation without any consultations with Congress. While the outcome of the ExCom's proceedings was favorable, the process could have resulted in a policy that might not have worked as well had there been less time for action. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), pp. 801--819, and Strobe Talbott, ed., Khrushchev Remembers, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1974), p. 514.

the Soviets understood that the U.S. was acting rationally.

After the Nuclear Threshold is Crossed. Even though U.S. options would severely decline after the first nuclear release, it would still be in the United States' interest to be alert for any hint of a Soviet departure from their public statements on war termination. Channels of communication would have to be kept open and some effort made to discourage further use of nuclear weapons. Although the task would be extraordinarily difficult, the U.S. would have to try to maintain rationality and encourage the Soviets to do the same; this would require asking their top leadership how they viewed the situation and what they foresaw as the next step.<sup>53</sup>

Because of U.S. memories of the Cuban missile crisis, there probably would be a strong temptation to "stand tough" after an initial nuclear strike and to foreswear all nonmilitary responses. In actuality, diplomatic and informal steps would have to be taken to enable the United States to make the best political and military decisions under the circumstances.

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53. In a full nuclear response, a lull probably would occur between the first and subsequent attacks as each side assessed damage and calculated how much of its reserve force to employ. Even in the worse circumstances, thus, the U.S. would still have an opportunity to communicate with the Soviets.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Soviet concepts of how to fight a large-scale war have evolved during the last two decades. Perhaps the greatest single change is the recognition that any future war should be kept conventional if at all possible. Nonetheless, the Soviets apparently still believe that nuclear war, while devastating, must be fought quickly and decisively if it cannot be avoided.

Given their concept of "victory," the Soviets see nuclear war ending only with complete defeat of the enemy once nuclear weapons have been used. Soviet doctrine regarding the end of conventional war is not as clear. It appears that there would be a greater chance of a negotiated settlement, however, during the conventional phase of conflict.

Differences in Soviet and U.S. views about escalation present a dilemma for the U.S. policy community because the Soviets see nuclear war ending in a fundamentally different way--with victory, not strategic surrender. The United States should seek to control escalation, starting with the conventional phase or earlier, by using carefully coordinated public and private diplomacy, military means, and informal contacts with the Soviets.

Because of their current doctrine, the Soviets probably

would be reluctant to cross the nuclear threshold. If they did so, however, rapid (and perhaps uncontrolled) escalation is likely. Taking this consideration into account, the United States can improve its chances of controlling conflict if it:

- Pays deliberate attention to plans and national policy involving war termination doctrine.
- Analyses more fully the relationship between conventional and nuclear phases of warfare.
- Encourages better integration of political, diplomatic, and military solutions to developing crises.
- Attempts to define more precisely where the nuclear threshold lies in various types of conflict.
- Better refines its definition of what would constitute an acceptable end to war under various scenarios.
- Undertakes dialogue with the Soviet Union on war fighting and termination issues.

These steps would help to control future conflict and, perhaps even more important, keep it from starting in the first place.

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